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# Embracing Intersectional Analysis: The Legacy of Anglo European Feminist Theory to Social Sciences-Humanities

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## 1. Introduction

During the past forty years, Gender/Women's Studies has developed into a well-established interdisciplinary site on inquiry and academic knowledge production, challenging traditional discipline's understandings of women's experiences from a critical perspective. Critical research and teaching on gender/sex, gendered hegemonies, gender relations, gender identity and social categories is today carried out in universities in many countries all over the world. Consequently, is possible to speak of feminist studies as a specific academic field of knowledge production (see Lykke 2010; Berger and Guidroz 2009). Interdisciplinary since its very origins, is mostly non-traditional, allowing for new synergies and cross-disciplinary dialogues to emerge between heterogeneous fields of theory and methodology. On this ground, one of the driving forces among diverse viewpoints has been the articulation of the paradigm gender along with other categories such as class, ethnicity and sexuality. Indeed, there is a line of continuity implied in a strong challenge to traditional sciences on the grounds that the social/cultural/human sciences throughout their history have sustained and legitimized biologically determinist approaches to sexes and culturally essentialist perceptions of gender. Within this framework, I approach Gender/Women's studies as a "vibrant and developing transnational phenomenon and web of activity" (Lykke 2010; foreword).

Nonetheless, on the problem of theorizing women's experiences in an accurate, grounded and nuanced way, intersectional ways of thinking have a long and complicated history within academic Anglo-European feminist thought. Minority groups' claims of invisibility within a 'universal female gender' and against essentialist discourses of gender can be documented in the very origins of mainstream women's movement (see Garcia, 1997). However, long-standing clashes and misconceptions in regards to differences among women have resulted in one of the most fructiferous and insightful theoretical debates around the interlocking socio-cultural categories of gender that the Anglo-European academia has continuously witnessed over the past decades. Within this spirit, this chapter proposes a reading on the evolution and development of differences among women in a parallel movement towards intersectional analysis, to illustrate the historical and intellectual journey of an intersectional mindset, from its much disputed origins till its enthusiastic

current reception in Anglo-European Women's/ Gender Studies, with the purpose to celebrate the interdisciplinary potential of a very transformative paradigm.

More specifically, from the decade of the 1980s, after the publication of the first women of color anthology in the U.S, *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981, 1983) a paradigm shift occurred thanks to their critical intervention. A well-documented political and literary movement most visible in the Anglo-European academy since the late 1980s, self-identified women of color in the U.S comprised both activists and scholars, from many diverse disciplines and backgrounds, first united with a clear vindication against a racist articulation of gender within mainstream feminisms. Dispelling the mantra of a 'unified sisterhood' as a primary explanatory force and arguing against additive analysis of 'race' and 'class' *This Bridge's* contributors were enlarging the scope of gender analysis to ways never before anticipated. Indeed, the intersectional identities of *This Bridge* challenged traditional gender theories to articulate their own politics of location and 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1988) in such a way they were forced to incorporate an interlocking understanding of socio-cultural categories. Interestingly, as we will see, in the decade of the 1990s intersectionality will be halted by the impact of postmodern/poststructuralist theories only to be revived again at the turn of the twentieth century.

On this ground, I wish to stress that contemporary gender theory and practice and their feminist epistemological positions are extraordinarily diverse. Gender studies, interdisciplinary by nature, are a very complex field to which many discourses contribute. However, it can be affirmed that the major paradigm shift that separates contemporary versions from earlier feminisms is a growing response to the demands for a politics of difference. The attention to difference and specificity led to an intense investigation of the production of gender identity which for women of color meant a greater focus on aspects other than gender that generate identity, for example class, ethnicity and sexuality. On the contrary, for postmodern and poststructuralists it meant highlighting the discursive, linguistic and communicative processes that construct gender identity. Acknowledging the interdisciplinary nature of this research, I not only aim at describing an engagement with gender feminist theory, structuralism, postmodernism and other main intellectual fields of knowledge. I am particularly interested in giving a general overview of so-called 'intersectional approach', which caused and continues to produce, heated debate but nonetheless, it has undeniably radically altered the way gender research is conducted nowadays, in an interdisciplinary manner.

With the intention to give voice to an undergoing reexamination of the central tenets in gender theory I urge to emphasize that many attempts have been made to articulate 'intersectional identities' along the way. To this regards, I acknowledge and underline that many feminist discussions of intersections have been carried out under other names, using metaphors and frameworks other than intersectionality. To this regard, this study does not intend to provide one and only version of this intercultural debate, rather it aims at analyzing one particular instance of many others. It is intended therefore to capture a general sense, to provide a glimpse into a conversation through its most well-known and representative voices but with no purpose to map a definitive itinerary or one way argument.

In order to lay out the main representative voices and stages in this ongoing discussion about differences among women, around the interlocking categories of gender and its progressive adoption within Women's/Gender Studies, this chapter relays on critical reading of the most relevant texts in the cultural, literary, feminist circles and mostly, postcolonial thinking, at major historical junctures. Seeking this interest, I paid special attention to those texts which best articulated the destabilization of hegemonic discourses of gender and those unmarked aspects that are challenged or altered by women of color and postmodern/poststructuralist feminists' intervention. As part of an intercultural ongoing conversation is made up of pieces: some written as long ago as the XVII century, some as recent as 2010. I try to smooth over these discontinuities by highlighting a persistent uneasiness among marginal voices within Anglo European feminist theory.

In presenting the main positions in feminist debates on epistemology, I would like to underline a pluralistic approach. Committed to a process of intense interdisciplinary debates, they present differential understandings of and intersections between discourses and gender embodiments. Epistemologically speaking, gender theories have been in critical dialogue with different strands of epistemological thought such as psychology, Marxism/socialism, structuralists and postmodern theories. Therefore, epistemological reflections intersect with many different types of postcolonial and anti-racist, postmodern/post-structuralists debates on epistemologies. As a result, my own cartographies encompass a diversity of sub-positions. This plurality is motivated by the heterogeneity and diversity of voices and perspectives that characterize feminist theorizing of gender identity. At the same time, it is intended to underline that besides this diversity, there are overlaps and shared points between different epistemological positions. Indeed, with a general overview of Anglo European feminist methodology, I intend to demonstrate how feminist approaches to methodology have continuously engaged with debates in Western philosophy to raise critical questions about knowledge production. Moreover, I seek to show how gender theories have achieved a distinctive place in academic socio-cultural research within Social Sciences/Humanities. In order to do so, this chapter is organized into nine sections: (1) Introduction, (2) definitions of basic terminology, (2.1) subject-subjectivity-identity, (3) historical background, (4) Parallel counterparts: second-wave feminists vs. minority groups in the U.S ( 1960s-1970s), (5) differences that divide (1980s): hegemonic feminism vs. women of Color in the U.S./Third World Feminism, (5.1) dominant feminist theory as an imaginary Space, (5.2) the politics of location: the birth of intersectionality, (6) The Impact of Postmodern-Post-Structuralist Theories (1990s), (7) the intersectional approach, (8) conclusion, and (9) references.

## **2. Definitions of basic terminology**

As much as gender relations are subjected to change, so it does their definition. Within this framework, I approach gender as a concept that specifies, marks out and layers together several historical moments. In one meaning, it will be referred to when all women were approached as interchangeably along the lines of sexual difference and essentialist womanhood. In another meaning, it refers to a time when women of color were increasingly present, with investments in specifying no parallel experiences. In addition, the impact of poststructuralist theories would turn the category of gender into a position of the subject in language that constitutes the subjectivity of the individual. Moreover, for postmodern

feminists, gender would increasingly mean the collapse of boundaries and fixed categories of meaning. Along these lines, intersectionality would become one term for the freeing of the ideological straitjackets imposed by gender as a static category of identity, enabling the recognition of differences and similarities between women. To these regards, I shall mostly ground this chapter in postcolonial theories in order to develop an understanding of power relations. In addition, the analysis of a gendered subjectivity, informed by postructuralist/postmodern theories, will complement an approach to intersections as processes rather than structures.

By the acknowledgement of the reiterative controversial nature of intercultural gender dialogues, I seek to emphasize that institutionalized gender-oriented scholarship urged to be rethought as an ongoing struggle over what constitutes the legitimate terrain of feminist theory and inquiry. Moreover, I intend to depict this complexity by challenging both the awareness of multiple intersections in and around gender as much as the cross over between different branches of knowledge.

### **2.1. Subject-subjectivity-identity**

In traditional Western philosophy 'subject' is variously defined as a rational, thinking and feeling entity, the mind, the ego, the conscious self whereas 'subjectivity' (all of which are important in feminist debates) refers to the conscious thoughts or feeling, of the self. Moreover, in psychoanalysis and post-structuralist theories, encompasses the unconscious meanings and desires, as much as the discursive structures in which subjects are embedded in. In addition, 'identity' has been variously deployed across many disciplines. Evident since the work of Fanon and Foucault (1977, 1980 1981) identity has also led into discussions of agency and resistance. Moreover, in feminist experience-based theories of the subject, a woman's self is both the result of her observation, structural positioning and practical engagement with the world (Weedon 2003:112). It is in this theoretical, methodological and epistemological approach that 'identity' is deployed in these intercultural dialogues as 'the self-naming and awareness of being who you believe to be'.

In sum, the terms 'subject', 'subjectivity' and 'identity' have been fiercely contested throughout the evolution of feminist critical thinking. Competing theories of subjectivity, variously derived from humanism (liberal thinking), Marxism, psychoanalysis post-structuralism and post-colonial theory had strongly influenced the way gender theory has evolved in Social Sciences and Humanities. Moreover, they have affected and undermined the approach on how critics view identity politics in terms of authorship, production, reception and meaning of texts.

In this line of thinking, I am aware that the very question of identity-subjectivity is so complex that it would deserve a separate study. Consequently, it is also my intention to highlight that the meaning of identity and subjectivity has been and still remains a much contested terrain. In short, identity and subjectivity, made more complicated by the charge of women of color, have shaped feminist critical thought which, in turn, has helped shaped the concepts.

## **3. Historical background**

In order to provide a context of the origins of this intercultural dialogue, the framing of a historical background would clarify why women of color in the U.S protests, insights, and



illuminating breakthroughs will entail a new stage within the development of a cross-Atlantic feminist dialogue.

To start, this revisionism takes off in the Enlightenment times since the American and French Declarations of independence opened the path to the creation of a feminist movement. The illustrated premises that affirmed that all the 'men' are born free and equal, and therefore with the same rights, progressively created the necessary social conditions that facilitated the first feminist claim of universal rights and duties arguing that women were equal of reasonable thinking and capable of self-government (Amorós 1985; Posada, 1998; Cobo, 1987).

However, postcolonial feminist thinking (Aído and Suárez, 2008; Cotera 1980; Harding and Narayan, 2000; Mohanty 1988/1991) has approached foundational texts within mainstream feminisms such as the french Olimpia de Gouges's *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* (1791) or the British Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) from the impact of colonization in the production of scholarly knowledge; that is, to what extent it can be traced an implicit inheritance of colonial thinking within early dominant feminisms.

As well documented as it is, in the preliminary stages of Anglo European women's movement, these women became the representatives of a 'universal oppressed female gender'. And to the extent in which they denounced a patriarchal logic that supported a conception of citizenship based on universal rights and duties but nevertheless, was depriving women of any political or social power, their words crowned them as the spokeswomen of a longed public challenge to a world of sexist traditions. However, from a postcolonial point of view (see Said 1994, 1979), their words were simultaneously forgetting that the political category of 'woman' they were speaking in behalf of, was part of a colonizing elite that it had internalized 'that we all are equal' by virtue of belonging to a generic human being.

On this ground, the vision of equality which these first feminists were claiming, was faithfully recreating the same sexist and patriarchal logic to which they were rebelling against since they were discursively colonizing the material and historical heterogeneity of the lives of women, producing a 'collective feminist subject' that had the mark of the authoritative voice of Western humanist speech. Due to the 'rule of colonial difference' in which cultural and social differences were naturalized in favor of a dominant norm (Chatterjee, 1993), for these first feminist voices difference equaled *sexual difference* alone. Along these lines, postcolonial revisionism foregrounds how in the realms of hegemonic structures of power, direct or overtly these women were locating gender strictly with the framework of sexual difference, in the dichotomy between the public and the private, thereby enabling the mediation of an abyss of experiences too broadly confronting as to be homogenized in a single category of 'woman' (see M. George, 1998)

Within a North American Scenario, *The Declaration of Sentiments* (1848), whose main figures were Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, reproduces the same pattern in which the naturalization of cultural differences within the solely category of 'sexual difference' not only becomes the bases of exclusion/subordination of women within an essentialist gender but mostly, it signals the birth of a very specific feminist consciousness and agency: Western, middle-class biased. Specifically, the absence of a class or racial consciousness is precisely what characterizes these first announcements. That is, the lack of inclusive

representation of non-white middle-class women who were experiencing oppression in terms of slavery, cultural assimilation, working-class or immigrant stigma. For the first time in history, a collective feminist political subject is articulated, but it does so, on the basis of an essentialist gender. This ideological position of an atemporal and anti-historical sexual difference overshadowed the very role that cultural differences were playing in the construction of a 'universal woman'; and in doing so, these first feminist manifestos somehow were undermining the very legitimacy of their vindications. Hence, the first feminist political subject was reproducing was discursively colonizing the material and historical heterogeneity of the lives of women, producing a 'collective feminist subject' that had the mark of the authoritative voice of Western humanist speech (see Mohanty 1991: 53).

Thus, I would like to bring attention to the historical background that fostered class and 'racial' division among feminists. In particular, how the relationship of minority groups to the women's movement has been from the very beginning marked by complex factors affecting the development of white women's authority voice and non/white women's invisibility. Replicating the same logic, first Anglo-European feminists' claims can be affirmed to be those of a 'sexual equality' vindicated from a *cultural neutral gender* signaling the ethnocentric limitations of the first feminist manifestos.

#### **4. Parallel counterparts: second-wave feminists vs. minority groups in the U.S ( 1960s-1970s)**

To continue tracing the logic of difference within Western mainstream feminisms, the decade of the 1960s represents the emergence of women experiences as a body of critical knowledge that progressively becomes institutionalized in the Anglo-European academia. In what it could be referred as the beginning of the decolonization of Western imagination' new scientific approaches such as psychoanalysis and semiology began to break down the binaries that had governed Western philosophy (as abstract/concrete, mind/body, culture/nature). In doing so, a new stream of critical consciousness began to be articulated within the boundaries of Anglo European rationale and imagination. The politization of marginal viewpoints and the de-identification of identity as a hallmark of critical western thought enabled therefore a framework that made possible that 'women's experiences' reached a new theoretical dimension and began to be mobilized, approached and analyzed as 'critical knowledge'.

Within this context, the initial task of the so- called 'second wave' feminist theorists was to generate theories that would account for the fundamentality of women's oppression. My aim here is to display some broad characteristics that might figure in clarifying what mainstream feminism encapsulated in the 1970s, with the purpose of understanding the resulting racist claims, the anger and the frustration of women of color in the U.S. Drawing strongly on the methodologies of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and linguistic structuralistic theories, gender theories had empathized with their struggles against the grand narratives of the Western enlightenment and modernity as much as with their focus on the de-articulation of a universal subject. Consequently, I will briefly map out the main features in the different approaches of the most representative trends that theorized what they understood to be the constituting nature of feminism.

For liberal feminists on one hand, for whom gender equaled sexual difference alone, women and men are basically the same and they drew heavily on this to press for changes in the

status (Nicholson, 1997). On the contrary, for Marxist/Socialist feminism the influence on Marxism brought to their theorizing an awareness of historical change and class position however, class was added to gender as an analytical tool (Weeden 2003) Moreover, a radical positioning awoke determined to free gender from its *Sexual Politics*' (Millet 1970) patriarchal constraints and so, for radical feminists such as Robin Morgan (1970) or Mary Daly (1978) the true revolution was based on the destabilization of universal structures of patriarchy as the primary determinant in women's oppression. This new radical impetus to theorize an engendered subjectivity also led to many theorists such as Luce Irigaray (1984) or Nancy Chodorov (1979) to turn into psychoanalysis.

Under these trends, gender theory encompassed a broader definition to include the play of the unconscious, dreams and the imagination in the production of scientific discourse. However, what unifies these different fields of feminist knowledge is the interdisciplinary articulation of the concept of gender as key paradigm to underscore how individual and collectives' identities/representations and spaces have social, cultural and political implications. The problem, however, was that in the growing tendency to document women's oppression and the paramount of gender as an organizing principle of social life, encompassing generalizations about 'woman', 'sisterhood' and 'patriarchy' started to get institutionalized. Consequently, albeit its different premises and viewpoints, what bounded all together was a conception of women identity grounded in the liberal approach of a feminist subject which found its roots in Enlightenment feminisms in which gender is defined in relation to 'sexual difference' alone. On this basis, sexual difference (women vs men) was considered to shape not only the definition of gender but, as it had happened in the first feminist vindications and manifestos, was articulated as the fundamental cause of women's subordination.

With the Civil Rights uprising in the U.S, parallel movements driven by self-identified long-standing militant Africans-Americans, Chicanas- Latinas, Native-American started to denounce mainstream feminisms for its racist and essentialist discourses of gender. At this point, I find important to clarify that until sufficient capitalist, cultural, political and historical conditions enabled an era of decolonization and economic globalization throughout the globe, the critical intervention of marginal voices would not have been envisioned.

Beginning late 1960s, albeit invisibilized within academic circles, minority groups urged to depict the existence of major philosophical and tactical issues between minority groups and white women's liberation groups. Collective wrath and claims of insidious differences at the very core of a 'universal sisterhood' made undeniable that a growing number of feminist voices were choosing neither to identify nor to fully integrate within the women's movement.

As early as 1972 Marta Cotera, a prominent figure in the Chicana movement, delivered a path breaking speech titled "Feminism as We See It" to the Texas Women's Political Caucus. She clearly stated that one of the major pitfalls in regards of white women's movement was their "basic racism of the mind"; that is, a racist cultural myopia which was preventing solidarity among women of different backgrounds (1977: 18). Echoing a long history of colonial unsettled issues, she emphasized the imperative to redirect attention towards racism as a much a stronger oppression than sexism. Speaking not only in behalf of Chicanas but Blacks, minority and poor women, she was directly addressing the racism and classism that these women faced on their daily basis from feminists in the name of feminism.



“Anglo women” she proclaimed, “must analyze their emotions and intellect and think clearly on this. Is the women’s movement a move to place just another layer of racist Anglo dominance over minority peoples?” (18).

Speaking up in favor of an approach to differences, Consuelo Nieto fervent defended that “for some it is sufficient to say, “I am woman.” For me it must be, “I am Chicana” (1974: 38). On this account, Marta Cotera made very clear that:

*No one can deny that we are all women, but neither can we deny that we are not The same; that many of us have not shared in the gains made in the name of “Woman” in this country. Chicanas share with the Blacks and other visible minority women many gaps in benefits enjoyed as a matter of course by white women (in Garcia, 1997:216)*

A study conducted at the University of San Diego in 1976 examined the extent to which women of color feminists sympathized with the white feminist movement. The study revealed that the majority of women of color surveyed (mostly Chicanas) found that even though the majority “could relate to certain issues of the women’s movement, for the most part they saw it as being an elitist movement compromised of white middle-class women who [saw] the oppressor as the males” (Orozco 1976: 12).

In the same front, since the publication of Gerda Lerner *Black Women in White America* (1972), Black Women were making important contributions. African-American voices such as Beverly Hawkins made clear that divergent cultural, social and economic experiences were separating ethnic minority women from mainstream feminism. Affirming how *Women is not Just a Female* (Hawkins 1973), her position aimed at making visible race as an oppressive social category on the basis that minority groups shared a unique history in America “since they’ve been exploited, abused, dehumanized, and killed because of the color of their skin” (3). This historical factor had determined how their stigma as cheap labor source is deeply rooted in a colonial legacy in which either racism or oppression “have traditionally been synonyms with good business practice for America” (2). As a result, accusations that white women practiced class and race discrimination against women of color were complemented by the charge that they were essentially opportunists and insensitive to their particular history and experiences.

In the same line of thought, passionately confronting the irreconcilable mainstream approach to gender theory, seeking to dismantle the ‘culturally dominant logic’ among women, the “Black Feminist Statement” was proclaimed by the Combahee River Collective (1974). Framed both as a denouncement of the capitalist/economic globalization impact on women, workers and ‘third world’ people, as much as a firm reaction against gender’s additive model and the imperializing nature of hegemonic universals, they affirmed that:

*We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981: 210; emphasis mine)*

In their words, gender finally emerges out of a grid of interlocking categories of oppression and privilege. Beyond the scope of public and private dimensions, the demand of an “integrated analysis” revoked gender as a non-politically neutral discourse that strongly needed to rethink its universalistic pretensions. Moreover, it was a reminder of a

multiplicity of worlds cross-culturally interconnected. As a path-breaking destabilization of gender, this new historical consciousness would change the way differences among women were to be theorized and negotiated and it will plant the seeds of a forthcoming women of color anthology: *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981, 1983).

This lack of unity and solidarity reached its peak at the beginning of the decade of the 1980s, and it was made most visible at the 1981 National Women's Studies Association Conference titled "Women Respond to Racism". Although the very title was conceived by the NWSA conference organizers as a remedy of these tensions, a sinister division among sisters was clearly depicted and an initial impetus was sadly clouded by the imposition of "the parameters of white women's values" (Sandoval 1990: 55). As a result, two categories were clearly opposed: "third world" and "white" (57). Consequently, what it was aimed to become a bridge ended in painful encounter of clashing ideas, leaving each group frustrated and incapable of working together. Chela Sandoval, the secretary of a 'third world women alliance', acting as a spokeswoman of 'minority women' resumed that, despite its theme, the racist structure of the conference alienated people from each other and from the topic in such a way the "separations between women are being frozen into place" (56). Accordingly, the Women of color/Third World Women in the U. S participants, left the conference with an infamous and distressing feeling that 'white women' had yet to directly address the issue of racism among women.

Furthermore, in spite of its denomination, the problematic issue of racism was setting women apart from each other as much as highlighting a separation between the analytical dimensions of gender and 'race'/ethnicity. Therefore, at this stage, what it was made clear was that approaching gender was to grapple with a problem: the loaded concept of identity and the controversial category of 'woman'. Without the incorporation of 'race'/ethnicity class and sexuality as multiple sources of oppression, coalition with white feminists would be highly unlikely.

## **5. Differences that divide (1980s): Hegemonic feminism vs. women of color in the U.S./third world feminism**

The publication of the path- breaking anthology edited by chicanas Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (1981, 1983) was as a confirmation of an-going understanding of how 'race'/ethnicity, one's culture, socio-economic status and sexual orientation can deny easy access to any legitimized gender category. In the soliciting letters, both editors stated:

*We want to express to all women –especially to white middle-class women- the experiences which divide us as feminists; we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice and denial of different- ces within the feminist movement. We intend to explore the causes and sources of, and solutions to these divisions. We want to create a definiition that expands what "feminism" means to us" (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981:lii; my emphasis)*

Its confronting insights collapsed for the first time traditional boundaries of identity and subjectivity, bringing into play fragmentation and power dissymmetry among feminists of different nationalities and backgrounds. This multi-genre book challenged 'white identified' feminists to deal with racism and other interlocking oppressions as never done before,

leading to a major re-conceptualization of mainstream gender theory. Motivated to break down all the racial frontiers which were enchainning gender to a mere sexual difference framework, women of color explicitly acknowledged in this anthology their historical bonds with colonized countries, hence awoken to the 'consciousness of a third world within a first world'. In their view, the democratization of cultural specificity compromised a commitment of aligning social categories in the specificity of their daily interactions. Indeed, the unfolding of a multidimensional-gender was aimed at the disruption of the prevailing additive gender model institutionalized during the second-wave period. Their unity, conceived as a continuous process of metamorphosis, emerged out of an intersection of different vectors of oppression/privilege capable of weaving difference, equality and diversity into a coalition of these interactions, utilizing them as political tactics constructed in response to dominating social powers. These social powers are located and refrained as an unfair capitalist patriarchal system that goes back to colonization times.

Not only praising its attention to differences among women *This Bridge* magnified them in order to make visible gender's interlocking social categories. At its strongest and most provocative, however, *This Bridge* does not simply emphasize difference. Rather, it redefines difference in potentially transformative ways. As a result of its impact, a reaction-in chain was activated towards the study of power dynamics within differences among women from a rhetorical making. Consequently, a central question remained the definition of feminism itself.

### 5.1 Dominant feminist theory as an imaginary space

On this ground, although gender studies had benefited from the proliferation of several women of color path-breaking anthologies, it wasn't enough critical insight on the role of their vindications in shaping Women's/Gender studies.

Consequently, my point here is to heighten how the recognition of differences among women -in practice, in struggles and theorizing, would prove gender theory as something less solid, more complex and diverse than had appeared to be in the beginnings of the 'second-wave' period.

In contrast to official' genealogy of feminist consciousness undertaken by influential theorists such as Lydia Sargent (1981), Allison Jaggar (1983); Hester Eisenstein (1985), Gayle Greene and Coopelia Kahn (1985) and Elaine Showalter (1985), the strategy that women of color would follow, situates difference at the focal point of gender theory. Specifically, in contrast to neo-liberal perspectives to differences as the object of study, for women of color differences were experienced and theorized as strategies (see Sandoval 2000).

In the pursuit of tracing an objective historical account of the history of feminist consciousness, mainstream theorists had divided this evolution into 'liberal' 'Marxist' 'radical/cultural' and 'Socialist' stages. Nevertheless, as it had happened with the early theorists of 'second wave' feminism power dynamics among scholars played an important role in the contesting discursive asymmetry between gender theory as a body of knowledge within the academy and its effectiveness in giving voice and representing inclusively the wide variety of women's experiences.

Hence, According to Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine in *The Future of Differences* (1985) for liberals, the primary goal was "to remove obstacles of fully participation in society and

to demonstrate that these differences could be *reduced*" (1985: xvi emphasis on the text). However, when liberals defended reason as universal, women of color demanded an approach concerning women and power investigated in specific contexts. As *This Bridge* stated, a serious investigation on "the denial of differences within the feminist movement" (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981: lli) was for them both a personal and a political priority. In the same vein, Audre Lorde described as *Sister/Outsider* (1984) this parallel trend that mainstream feminism was ignoring:

*As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define woman in terms of their own experience alone, then women of color become the 'other', the outsider whose experience and tradition is 'too' alien to comprehend (117)*

Regarding the Marxists/ socialists stage, Lydia Sargent for example, in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (1981) although she agrees that three previous stages failed to integrate the discussions about racism and classism within the feminist movement, she does not take into account women of color's accountability for this progressively awareness. "As the women's movement grew more diverse "recalls Hester Eisten, "it was being forced [supposedly by women of color but as Chela Sandoval points out, she does not name who (2000: 43)] to confront and to debate issues of difference" (1985: xix), albeit within a sexual difference framework. Additionally, for Jaggar, in this second stage, far from seeking to demolish or minimize women's difference from men, feminist Marxists were asserting the need to re-structure society in a way that eradicates the subordination that women suffer as a "different class" (1983: 50).

The problem was that in actuality, attempts to address the relationship of class analysis to gender amounted to adding class. Therefore, class was seen as an adjunct to gender inequality besides seen as a fundamental power relation between men and women (Henessy 2003: 58). But as we have previously seen, *the Combahee River Collective* not only had uncovered the relationship between gender and class as interlocking in nature, mostly, it had unfolded many other interlocking systems of oppression/privilege besides that of class. Consequently, in what refers to the 'dual system' (patriarchy and capitalism) elaborated by socialists in the 1970s, women of color contended that this paradigm did not elaborate further beyond the interface between the two systems as the root of women's oppression (Harsen and Philipson 1990:19). From this vantage point, as *The Combahee River Collective* have argued, any explanation of women's lives under capitalist systems needs to begin not with the assessment that there are two systems of oppression but rather with the ways in which capitalism uses the patriarchal structures that precede it and developed alongside. Indeed, the concept of 'classism' which features in this approach understands class relations as an oppressive social practice parallel to gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other social categories.

Along this lines, a great example of unveiled power dynamics can be found in Audre Lorde's letter to Mary Daly after the publication of *Gyn/Ecology*. "This letter has been delayed because of my grave reluctance to reach out to you," Lorde hearty contends:

*for I want us To chew upon here is neither easy not simple. The history of white women, who are unable to hear Black women's words, or maintain a dialogue with us, is long and discouraging. But to assume that you will not hear me represents not only history, perhaps, but an old pattern of relating, sometimes protective and sometimes dysfunctional, which we, as women shaping our future, are in the process of shattering and passing beyond, I hope (1984: 66-7)*



While reading through Daly's accounts of the goddess, Lorde recalls, she wondered to herself: "why doesn't Mary deal with Afrekete as an example? Why are her goddess images only white, western European, judeo-christian? (67). She narrates how she first assumed that Daly was dealing only with the tradition of Western European women, "in which case her choices were valid". Sadly, she pieced together a "white women dealing only out of a patriarchal western European frame of reference" (68). Thus, throughout this "Open letter", she accuses Daly of using tools of patriarchy against non-European women, African women in particular, by applying that all women suffer from the same oppression. While Lorde agrees that "the oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries", she insists that "that does not mean it is identical within those differences" (70). Beyond a sisterhood that fails to recognize different forms of patriarchal oppression, Lorde unmasks Eurocentric racism within the so-called radical feminism. "The herstory and myth of white women" she firmly argues "...serves the destructive forces of racism and separation between women" (Lorde 1984:70).

Mary Daly decided not to respond to Lorde.....

Daly's silence and lack of courage to confront Lorde reinforced the stigma of discursive colonization among women. As Amber L. Katherine analyses in "A Too Early Morning: Audre Lorde's 'An Open Letter to Mary Daly' and Daly's Decision not to Respond in Kind" (2000) Daly, like other radical feminists at that time, wasn't able to grasp how Lorde's radical black politics and her feminist black complaint were just one voice (290). As a result, Daly was unable to see how the claim for multiplicity in feminist voices was Lorde's challenge of a radical, revolutionary movement. Moreover, by not replying to Lorde, Daly put into question if her 'radical feminism' was nothing more than a eurocentric radical feminism, which against everything that it predicted, was a way of thinking that perpetuated the same patriarchal structures they were revealing against. As Lorde strongly insisted: "assimilation within a solely western european herstory is not acceptable" ((Lorde 1984:70)

As we have seen, in order to question mainstream theorizing, major counter-attacks were made by women of color to these institutional strands. Mostly, it was brought into surface dissymmetrical power relations implied within gender's multiple and overlapping axes of signification. In particular, an analytical myopia was highlighted which was carried out since Enlightenment times that had turned feminist theory into a conceptual fantasy around a flawed gender. It was flawed because it was added to other social categories as if they were layers that could be taken apart from each other. It did not thus stand for how the relations of power implicate one another. On this ground, intense intercultural dialogues revealed 'gender analyses as an imaginary location'. Therefore, the feminist theory produced from the decade of the 70s to the end of the 1980s was attacked by women of color as the articulation of an *imaginary space* (Sandoval 2000: 52.3) an ethnocentric collective illusion and theoretical delusion.

## 5.2 The politics of location: the birth of intersectionality

As a result of women of color's major insights into a new gender cross-examination 'the politics of Location' in gender analysis is acknowledged, allowing the unique and genuine character of women's experiences to finally become both the source and the analysis of



critical knowledge. First articulated by North American feminist theorist and poet Adrienne Rich intends to give voice to a new cognitive mapping of gender and its interlocking social categories in the recognition that gender must be specifically located.

To these regards, Rich wonders how was it possible that white feminists had educated themselves about such enormous amount of knowledge over the past twenty years that “how come they hadn’t also educated themselves about women of color when it is the very key of their survival as a movement?” (cited in Lorde 1983: 100). Attempting to extent women of color critical gaze toward identity, Rich shares their sense of urgency as she targets mainstream feminists to re-examine the politics of their location in North America. “The need to examine not only racial and ethnic identity”, Rich elicits:

*but location in the United States of North America. As a feminist in the United States is seemed necessary to examine how we participate in mainstream Cultural chauvinism, the sometimes unconscious belief that white North Americans posses a superior right to judge, select and ransack other cultures, ... we can’t explode into breadth without a conscious grasp on the particular and concrete meaning of our location here and now (1986; 162)*

Along these lines, feminist struggle no longer meant a synonym of resistance to relations of domination (in its broad a-historical patriarchal sense) but “the capacity for action that specific relations of domination enable and facilitate” (Mahmood 2005: 203).

Within this ‘located’ scenario, finally, the specific birth of intersectionality as a concept is theoretically formulated and validated within women of color academic circles at the end of the decade of the 1980s. In 1989, the African American lawyer and feminist theorist Kimberley Crenshaw coined ‘intersectionality’ in “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989), as tool for highlighting how the categories of ‘race’ and ‘gender’ are mutually interconnected in the daily struggles and experiences of women of color. An intersectional mindset was finally in motion. Reinforced by prominent feminist theorists such as African American Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991) the critical intervention of *This Bridge* had finally found a promising epistemological tool to make visible the experiences of women of color. “Instead of starting with gender and the adding in other variables such as age, social orientation, social class, a religion, Collins informs:

*black feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination. Viewing relation of domination for any given socio-historical context as being structured via a system of interlocking race, class and gender oppression expands the focus of analysis from merely describing the similarities and differences, distinguishing these systems of oppression and focuses greater attention on how they interconnect. Assuming that each system needs the others in order to function creates a distinct theoretical stance that stimulates the rethinking of basic social sciences concepts (226)*

## 6. The impact of postmodern-post-structuralist theories (1990s)

Moving on to the decade of the 1990s, and due to a negative and reactive criticism to gender brought up under the light of intersectionality, postmodern and poststructuralists feminists dashed into this academic Anglo European debate aiming at destabilizing singular identities even further. The term ‘subject’ will become ingrained in a grammatical meaning embedded

in the linguistic structures and predicates which were central to post-structuralist theories of subjectivity. In these theories, the identification with the position of the subject in language constitutes the subjectivity of the individual. For postmodernist, the attention will be placed on the collapse of boundaries and fixed categories of meaning. As a result, crucial methodological incompatibilities between women of color's insights and postmodern and poststructuralist feminist will arouse and gender and its interlocking categories will become a contested site subject to variable interpretations. In doing so, a fascinating debate would take place engaging minority groups and mainstream feminists alike.

Stepping into Postmodern Theories, it is crucial the work of North American scientist and theorist Donna Haraway highly influenced by Foucault, in her *ciberfeminism* (1990) where she introduces virtual scenarios for the advancement of re-conceptualizing a new understanding of gender (Lopez-Varela, 2012) and its interwoven axes of differences. Indeed, the postmodernist focus in the collapse of boundaries and fixed categories of meaning would be a source of engagement with women of color, for whom the vexed concept of gender and its intersectional "new value system" was now foregrounding of a recognition that commanded the capacity to "blur boundaries" (Anzaldúa, 1987:103). Postmodern emphasis on 'fragmentated identities' (Zalbidea, 2011) nonetheless would distance themselves from women of color imperative to attend to multiplicity as a whole, not as a fragmentation.

In addition, in more 'textualist-discursive stance', poststructuralist feminist theories chiefly associated to various degrees with Derrida, Foucault and Lacan, sought to focalized the center of the analysis to the exploration of subjectivity as an 'engendered performance'. Within this context, deconstruction will be embraced as a necessary methodological tool to analyze identity. Moreover, human embodiment, passive for traditional gender theory, would turn into a dynamic and interactive constructivist ('subject positions') gender theory. For Italian feminist philosopher Rossi Bradotti (1998) it meant the incorporation of 'nomadic subjects'. For the Bengali-U.S based Gayatri Spivack, the feminist subject will necessary be part of 'subaltern consciousness' (1988). Moreover, for Italian feminist film critic Teresa de Lauretis, the value-coding of gender theory needed to be approached through semiotic lenses. Thus, she draws on the theories of Althusser and mainly Foucault to defend what she called as 'technologies of gender' (1987).

Nevertheless, if there was a theory that really made an impact was Judith Butler's theory of performativity. In *Gender trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1991) Butler denaturalizes gender categories by proposing that they are performative; that is, gender is part of an overall structure of power that can be disrupted by individual agency. Butler's main point would be that power relations not only determine and constitute the subject but there are the very pre-condition for its agency. Interestingly, performative agency burst into feminist theory to complement the intersectional awareness of social categories. However, the most controversial part of Butler's view was that if identity was oppressive, then, social liberation would depend on the freeing from normalizing categories of identity; that is, eliminating categories all together, something that women of color could not afford to do. As a result, intense methodological clashes would provoke much heated debated. On this ground, framed in a context marked by the problematization of language, the increasing impetus by women of color to apply an intersectional gaze will be halted by strong criticisms of identity politics and its emphasis on

experience. Moreover, the 'counter-affirmation' of oppositional identities will be opposed by post-structuralists on the basis that ended up in reasserting the very dualisms they were trying to undo. Indeed, both post-structuralism and postmodernism argued that the reliance on personal identity leads to an individualistic notion of change. Positioning themselves very differently, women of color firmly opposed to transcend 'gender's politics of location' since the relation of experience to discourse is what they believed to be at issue in the definition of gender theory.

Consequently, post-modern/poststructuralists feminists were claiming that there were multiple realities only accessible through representations of culture, or deconstructions of language and discourses, and therefore no single truth or accessible reality could be tackled if realities were only what people believe them to be. On the contrary, women of color completely rejected this relativist perspective. They understood nonetheless, that language is a critical element in connecting knowledge and experience, if it is through language that identities, subjectivities and experiences are made, given meaning and remade. In other words, the charge of interlocking oppressions led not only to a reflection of the intersection of axes of oppression/privilege with gender, but also to the reworkings of what constitutes identity. Within this spirit of methodological clashes the concept of 'woman' was impossible to formulate in a consensual way precisely for feminists themselves.

The magnitude of the controversy is most brilliantly depicted in 'The Greater Philadelphia Philosophy Consortium' (September 1990) in which, specially Turkish- United states based critical theorist Seyla Benhabib and American post-structuralist Judith Butler, performed a fructiferous interdisciplinary cross-over aimed at generating communication across theoretical boundaries and political divisions (Benhabib, Butler, Cornell and Fraser, 1995).

On one side, there was Benhabib's denial of postmodernist premises and her dispute with Butler about an unclear normative vision of agency which follows from or it is implied by her theory of performativity. And on the other, Butler's reaction to critical theory as the articulation of a 'stable subject' will be subjected to the denounce that any type of 'comprehensive universality' recreates totalizing notions of gender identity only achieved at the cost of producing new and further exclusions. At one point, either critical theory or a post-structuralist perspective will become completely incompatible and it will be demanded to be chose between one or the other in order to successfully approach gender and its social categories.

To mediate in the debate, Nancy Fraser in "*A False Antithesis: A Response to Seyla Benhabib and Judith Butler*" argued that their arguments have created a series of 'false antithesis' that were clouding current gender theories. Her point was to establish the links between both standpoints to demonstrate that they were not so incompatible after all and both insights were enriching gender analysis. As Fraser would argue, the discursive signification of gender brought by the 'linguistic turn' remained only one dimension of sociality among others.

Accounting interlocking differences through open-ended cartographies consequently remarked a crucial priority since if the Philadelphia debate reached any conclusion that would be the need to articulate more complex frameworks open to both specificity and strategic alliances. Despite methodological and theoretical clashes, the point remained that 'differences' had emerged as a central -albeit contested and paradoxical- concept within

gender theory. Indeed, even though women of color acknowledged the relationship between categories and the dynamics of power, their anthologies were a claim, as much as a demonstration, of how, in specific historical contexts, the use of identity politics had been a crucial mechanism of resistance and a more effective criticism than the semiotic deconstruction of classism or sexism as categories of power.

On a different stance, the concept of intersectionality was also being strongly attacked by British feminists Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias who were demanding intersectionality to move beyond its restrictive emphasis on identity politics. In *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and Anti-Racist Struggle* (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992), their point would be to highlight a restraining homogenization of oppression (as 'women of color in the U.S/U.K.') led to a formulation of intersectionality in such a way that dismissed the importance played by the symbolic dimension of gender identity construction. On that ground, Anthias and Yuval-Davis brought into question the need to develop an analytical framework that would enable the articulation of both the material and the symbolic dimensions of social divisions in an intercultural way.

Influenced by Italian Transversal feminists, Yuval Davis will develop the model of 'rooting and shifting' gender identity positions. To clarify this strategy of 'rooting' and 'shifting' Yuval-Davis elicits how:

*The idea is that each ...in the dialogue brings with her **rooting** in her own membership and identity, but at the same time, tries to **shift** in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have a different membership and identity. They called this form of 'transversalism' to differentiate from 'universalism' which, by assuming a homogenous point of departure, ends up being exclusive instead of inclusive (1997:130; her bold)*

At this point, within the Anglo-European Academia, the debates will be centered around two main ways of approaching and interpreting the intersectionality of social divisions: on one side it was the intersectional model developed by Third World feminists in the U.S and on the other side, the constitutive 'rooting' and 'shifting' model offered by the British transversal feminists.

## 7. The intersectional approach

Within this context of re-articulating more inclusive identity-formulas the urgency of the implementation of an 'intersectional' vantage point to differences among women will start to powerfully vibrate again. The paradoxes, power dissymmetry and fragmentations of the XXI century context required feminists to shift the identity debate to one approach that would enable an analysis of the global and the local interwoven.

To these regards, a remarkable twist occurred within women of color's perspectives. In order to address the contested nature of an intersectional approach strongly affected by its association with radical identity politics, women of color would be finally willing to abandon restrictive labels. As a result, Gloria Alzandúa and Anne Louise Keating edited *This Bridge We Call Home*, in which *Radical Writings by Women of Color* transmuted into *Radical Writings for Transformation* (2002). The message sent by the editors was that clear: the loosing of previous restrictive labels, while intensely painful, is the only path to create shifts in consciousness and transgressive opportunities for change.



*This Bridge we call home carries the displacement further. It questions the terms white and women of color by showing that whiteness may not apply to all whites, as some possess women-of-color consciousness, just as some women-of-color bear white consciousness. This book intends to change notions of identity, viewing it as a more complex system covering a larger terrain, and demonstrating that the politics of exclusion based on traditional categories diminishes our humanness (2)*

Gloria Anzaldúa's most provocative claim relays on her emphasis on consciousness, as the shifts she proposes go from the external (culturally-imposed and racialized categories) to the internal (self-selected ways of thinking and acting). In particular, I intend to make visible the grounds of a new approach towards intersectionality; one that would no longer delimit or distract intercultural dialogues by the means of its identification with women of color's experiences. In this spirit, *This Bridge We Call Home* symbolizes as an insightful momentum within this intercultural dialogue, in which boundaries tore apart, broke down and finally became more permeable.

At this point, 2002, the intersectional awareness of gender identity had become the continuous reinvention of universal claims by the particularization of specific meanings. On this ground, a new stage for intersectionality was bound, to some degree, to provoke a new response within the academia in what it's been recently named as the 'Intersectional Approach' (see Berger and Guidroz 2009).

Current discussions as those depicted in the *European Journal of Women's Studies* 2006 Edition and the latest analyses on this issue as such exposed in *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy Through Race, Gender and Class* (Berger and Guidroz 2009) and in *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (Nina Lykke 2010), explore what makes intersectionality so successful nowadays. Unexpectedly, it has turned into an interdisciplinary joint platform that provides a way to overcome incompatibilities between women of color's theory and post/modern, post-structuralist feminisms.

Kathy Davis, in her article "Intersectionality as a Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful", is convinced that the promise of an intersectional perspective is that it offers a novel link "between critical feminist theory and the effects of sexism, class and racism and a critical methodology inspired by postmodern feminist theory, bringing them together in ways that could not have been envisioned before" (73). In her view, intersectionality is the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination (67). Anne Phoenix in "Editorial: Intersectionality", celebrates its semantic potential as "a handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it" (2006: 187). On the whole, there is still no general agreement on how to proceed with it, use it as a method or as a theory. However, it seems to be a consensus within academia, that it should be embraced mostly 'as a dynamic process' (Staunanes 2003). The fact that it serves to give voice to one of the most problematic normative concerns; that is, how to name differences among women in a non-hierarchical and exclusionary way, gives it potential to "provide a platform in which feminist theory could be theorized as a joint enterprise in an interdisciplinary way' (Davis, 72). As Davis points out, the new intersectional gaze matches perfectly with the postmodernist project of multiple and dislocated identities and its mission of deconstructing normative, totalizing and foundationalist categories (71). Moreover, it aligns with the commitment of the politics



of location, which Haraway coined as 'situated knowledge' (183-201) and it works with Butler's performative approach to gender and its understanding of power as a dynamic process that can be disrupted by individuals' agency.

Methodologically speaking, despite the plurality of ways in which intersectionality is currently being applied, it could be said that what unifies its different strands is the idea that only by treating social categories as relational, can illuminating and fruitful knowledge be produced (Yuval-Davis, 2006 194). However, the unfolding of how these social positions relate has created a great deal of debate (see Sotelo, 2009). Recently, the focus of the debate has been shifted from the relationships among social divisions themselves towards the different analytical levels in which intersectionality is located. Some claim that since categories such as 'race' or 'class' have different organizing logics, social categories cannot be treated at the same level of analysis. (see Staunaes) In the same vein, Mieke Verloo in "Multiple Inequalities, Intersectionality and the European Union", points at how "different inequalities are dissimilar because they are differently framed". Therefore, she argues that "it's important to ground policy strategies not in the similarity but in the distinctiveness of inequalities" (2006: 212). Yuval-Davis, in "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics" emphasizes how "social divisions are about macro axes of social power but also involve actual, *concrete people*" (198, italics mine). She stresses the separation of different levels of analysis. She explains how "social divisions have organizational, intersubjective, experiential and representational forms, and this affects the ways we theorize the connections between the different levels". (194).

Progressively, both in Europe and in the United States, it has generated an intense theoretical debate and has become one of the main topics of research within Women's Studies Programs. In "Narrative Accounts of Origins: A Blind Spot in the Intersectional Approach?", Baukje Prins (2006) focuses on British and North-American trends and makes a division between what she calls 'systematic intersectionality' (mostly US-based) from 'constructionist intersectionality' (mostly UK-based). In her view, the constraints of the systematic approach and its limits on representing complexities derive from the way categories are approached as implicitly a part of a structure of domination and marginalization, it translates into a notion of power as 'unilateral and absolute' in which the subject is primarily constituted by systems of domination and exclusion and is taken to be the passive bearer of the meanings these social categories imply. Prin, on the other hand, argues that the constructivist approach allows for a more nuanced complexity because categories of signification are viewed as part of a creative, constructive process in which the relationships between positioning, identities and political values are all central and not reducible to the same ontological level. According to the constructivist perspective, markers of identity such as gender, class, etc. are not only merely "disciplinary powers" (Collins, 1998, 79 note 5), limiting forms of categorization, "but simultaneously provide narrative and enabling resources" (Prin, 2006: 280).

## 8. Conclusion

As we have seen, gender, class and 'race' were once seen as separate issues for members of both dominant and subordinate groups. Nowadays, however, a growing number of scholars generally agree that these categories (as well as sexuality, age, dis-ability and so on) and how they intersect are a crucial knowledge to understand individual's position in the grid of

social relations. Indeed, it is undeniable that social categories play a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world. Since they are embodied connections of gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so forth, when approached as interlocking, intersectionality offers us tools for de-legitimizing the negative stereotypes of these categories, as much as the possibility to deconstruct the very mechanisms that maintain gender/class/racial, etc orders.

Continually changing, interactions shape both everyday relations and social structures by mutually reinforcing interlocking vectors of privilege and marginalization. Hence, as the intersectional scholars previously analyzed shows us, the intersections of social power are evident both as the micro layers of daily social life as well as the broadest layers of global restructuring. In its two-fold nature, it both defines individual identity in connection to one's particular social location and, at the same time, it structures a global system of privilege and exclusion. The power of intersectionality then, relays on the fact that it has become a new inter-disciplinary dynamic site of knowledge that tackles unequal social relations of power, both privileging and/or marginalization, in gender identity formation processes. At this point, it can be affirmed that the diverse theories (and methodological approaches) that contribute to the current intersectional approach represent a new social literacy for scholars, a "disciplinary border-crossing concept" (Berger and Guidroz 2009: 7), not necessarily implying that the power dynamics- battle will be ever won, but making it necessary to read texts differently.

Consequently, what contemporary theories on intersectionality offer scholars and students who are studying identity is the idea that identities are not fixed but constantly shifting and navigating across social boundaries. Treating social categories as relational and as a dynamic site of knowledge is the main requirement of a transformational mindset. Along these lines, the rich variety of approaches offered by the field today undoubtedly shows that intersectionality has become a very appealing way of doing research.

The potential of the intersectional approach thus stems from its dynamic analytical framework in which, on one side, categories are essential but on the other, they are called and put into question. On this ground, it can be affirmed that what Social Sciences-Humanities can benefit from intersectionality is the articulation of a new formula in progress aimed at providing a 'safer' theoretical space where differential power relations are acknowledged and addressed rather than overlooked. Indeed, throughout this journey towards intersectionality, the main challenge to mainstream feminism has been to recognize that individuals are raced, sexed, classed as much as being gendered. Moreover, it has discredited the 'additive-multiplicative' claims of multiple oppressions as much as it has rethought its own limitations on the basis that it does not distinguish between different levels of analysis apart from the experiential (Yuval-Davis 2006:197). In this way, intersectionality offers a critical alternative to identity politics since it takes into account intra-group differences and calls into question any homogenized or essentialized group-identity category such as 'women of color', or 'whites'.

And it is precisely at this point, that is, the loosening of previous restrictive labels in a stage in which differences among women had evolved to incorporate an intersectional approach to gender identity, in which I would like to highlight what in my opinion lays the key to understand the evolution of differences in its journey towards intersectionality. Consequently, this general overview sustains the argument that the explicit embracement of

intersectionality within Gender/Women's Studies at the turn of the xxi century, gave voice to a theoretical endeavor that until then had been widespread and outspoken among women of color academic circles but it lacked the proper articulation that an all-inclusive conceptualization establishes; that is, the required receptivity to collaborative approach.

One argument that I make about gender theory in feminist studies is embedded in my approach to feminist thinking and production as part of 'on-going dialogues' with the intention to challenge both traditional taxonomies and to defy any unitary history of Women's/Gender studies. Therefore, one of my main points has been to heighten the particular specificities in the discourses of gender identity among Anglo-European feminists, very much historically –at times almost momentarily- located, continually rewritten and re-inscribed with new meanings.

To approach contemporary gender theory then implies the willingness to pull the threads of divergent and connective meanings, layers of both theoretical abstraction and specific and particular experiences, of categories and feelings, inclusion, collective awareness and particularity.

Throughout the time span covered, the evolution of differences among women encompassed a theory which emerged out of tensions between movements and power-laden debates about which intersections, power differentials and regulations should be given priority in which political contexts. Thus, to the extent that I have stressed the evolution of differences among women, I have also mapped intersectionality's various stages within the Anglo-European academia, in the light of on-going efforts to theorize intersectional categories of identity as a cross cultural tool.

However, I don't mean that 'dialogues' are not deployment of power dynamics. On the contrary, I believe that 'intercultural dialogues' discussing power differentials is the first step to destabilize them. Thus, I have approached its controversy as a part of an on-going intercultural debate that has offered and continues to provide, highly sophisticated theoretical insights in addressing the power dynamics in the intersections of gender, in order to comprehend and activate the processes of undoing traditional approaches. Nonetheless, as a much-disputed concept, I have also intended to reflect how intersectional analyses are still under continuous interrogation. To these means, by approaching women of color/Third World Feminism in the U.S I intend to make complex the construction of 'gender identity', and mostly, to challenge a unified history of the 'women's movement' in an Anglo-European academic framework. Indeed, I believe that one most important contributions of women of color in the U.S., embodied in the very concept of 'intersectional gender', is to make visible a 'hegemonic' feminist theory; that is, ingrained westernized hegemonic analytical paradigms that, although it does not mean that is practiced by all, nonetheless, it refers to that powerful center that requires all other forms to define themselves in terms of it (Mohanty 1988; 1991).

Along these lines, my intention to focus on the insights of postcolonial, postmodern and postructuralists theories to highlight a redefinition of cultural practices, generating theoretical and methodological approaches that aim at transgressing disciplinary borders. As the emergence of the concept of intersectionality is closely linked to postcolonial feminist struggles, it seeks to establish platforms for the analysis of the intertwining processes of social categories such of genderization, racialization and ethnification that operate in a boundary space between different political discourses of resistance.

Within this spirit, I deeply share the belief with this new generation of intersectional scholars that the intersectional approach increasingly constitutes a promising middle ground, in methodological terms, for interdisciplinary scholars in the application of both their teaching and their knowledge production. Along these lines, I present this work in hopes of deepening the discussion among professors and students about what this dynamic site of knowledge offers us in scholarship, teaching and activism. The breadth of this ongoing intercultural interest in dialoguing differences in an interlocking and non-hierarchical way, it definitely suggests future compelling inquiry and research.

Moreover, examinations of intersectionality call for scholars to be self-reflexive of his or her standpoint as it relates to research inquiry. Methodologically, the implementation of an intersectional approach calls upon scholars to examine the extent to which institutions reflect difference and are self-critical about how difference impact knowledge production. Although many scholars carefully situate their own social identities within their work, these disclosures tend not to fully examine the theoretical implications of intersectionality within their analyses. Consequently, by approaching identity and power differentials in isolation and not taking into account how these intersections impact the ultimate production of knowledge prevents researchers from pursuing a richer and more complex analysis. Therefore, to negotiate power dynamics across intersections of social locations must be a primary focus of any cultural or literary research. Furthermore, it is ultimately necessary to acknowledge that our particular situated perspectives (Western in this case) integrally shape our theories and teaching. As a result, the creation of an environment where faculty can develop institutionally rewarded intersectional scholarly identities would reflect the praxis of doing engaged and accountable theory and research in the twenty-first century.

In my reading, intersectionality reminds us and demonstrates both the proximity and indivisibility of gender with other social categories, as well as indicating that they are inextricably linked to other forms of social and cultural knowledge. These multiple layers ultimately challenge any notion of universally shared experiences as 'women' or any other gender for that matter urging us to interrogate the power-dynamics implied in the meanings we contest and to what extent is gender identity able to separate in practice from other power relations. Moreover, it invites us to keep our eyes on the challenge of meeting affinities that collectively binds us to one another over our differences or group identities. Above all, it allows us to join with others from the politics of location to imagine and to insist that a more just alternative is possible as long as we continue to challenge and deconstruct the very ways in which power dynamics are being formed and transformed in our daily social encounters, while we passionately pursue this aim. Only then, Social Sciences-Humanities in general and Cultural, Literary and Gender/Women's Studies in particular, can hold up a mirror that represents all voices in an accurate, grounded and nuanced way.

In sum, the challenge for intersectional theory therefore, lies not in finding ways to break out gender constraints so gender theories become more 'inclusive', but rather in developing concepts that can allow us better to understand the real material and symbolic conditions that both link and variously affect our lives. In the end, these concepts are intimately bound to the horizons for change we envision, the intercultural dialogues that we imagine, the kind of world we dare to dream about and set out to achieve.



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